

MERCH MAGAZINE

from the
bpma
British
Promotional
Merchandise
Association

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2026

LOGO

DESIGN

MERCH

ADVERTISING

STRATEGY

INSIDE

JACK'S WAY

How Jack Daniel's handles its promotion

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FUTURE PROOF

Can Gen Z cut it in the workplace?

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CREATIVE BUILDING BLOCK

Why merchandise should be in the marketing mix PAGE 10

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WELCOME

As we head towards the end of the year, it's easy to get bamboozled by the dizzying array of promotional merchandise that's available to us.

As *Merch Magazine* columnist, and BPMA Chairman Clive Allcott points out in this issue (p25), areas like promotional apparel are being revolutionised by technology. Smart clothing can now collect information, respond to the environment and interact with the wearer. It's quite a leap from the humble logo-ed T-shirt.

While our resident tech guru, Matt Pluckrose bangs the drum for such gadgetry, he emphasises that really smart users are those that are able to make merchandise choices feel indispensable,

desirable and in tune with a brand (p31).

That's the essence of a great merch-led campaign, and the reason why more brands are looking to use merch in a strategic and creative way. In this issue, we have some great case studies of how brands are enlisting bespoke merchandise.

Companies like Netflix, Rare Beauty and hotelier BHC are just some of the brands that don't see merch as an afterthought but as something that is a genuinely cool conversation starter for its audience. Read more about how they're doing it on p16 of this issue.

For brands like Jack Daniels, promotional merchandise and POS is central to the way they advertise globally. It's too important to

be handled in an ad hoc manner, so they are increasingly adopting strategies to control the quality, distribution, and investment of their merch. Find out how they're doing it on p17.

It's indicative of a sector that is continually upping its game and becoming more professional across the board. Witness the growing focus on sustainability as a provable benefit, a level of M&A activity that shows the worth of merchandise businesses, and a more highly trained workforce that can cater to the demands of today's customers.

With that in mind, congratulations go to all of this year's BPMA graduates who were honoured at this summer's ceremony in the Houses of Parliament. They are the future of the industry, which looks to be in safe hands.



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Merch Magazine is available to the whole promotional merchandise industry. It is the official magazine of the British Promotional Merchandise Association (BPMA).

in @ bpma

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A DAY TO REMEMBER

The BPMA celebrated its 2026 graduates at the House of Commons

This summer, the BPMA Graduation Ceremony returned to the House of Commons for a sun-filled afternoon celebrating the achievements of this year's TPM and CPM graduates.

The BPMA Education Programme is the association's online professional development programme, tailored specifically to the promotional merchandise sector and created by industry experts.

Two tracks are available to BPMA members: Trained in Promotional Merchandise (TPM) and Certified in Promotional Merchandise (CPM). In 2025, the programme proudly achieved CPD accreditation with the Association for Accredited Learning.

RECOGNITION SHARED

The event began with a champagne reception, networking and bowl food, as guests enjoyed stunning views across the Thames. Graduates connected with fellow learners, colleagues and industry peers before the official ceremony began.

BPMA CEO Phil Goodman and BPMA Chair Clive Allcott then took to the stage to formally open the afternoon's ceremony. Goodman shared a brief industry update before recognising the hard work, dedication and achievements of the graduates. Allcott then invited each graduate to the stage to receive their



The BPMA's Phil Goodman and Clive Allcott officiated



THE CLASS OF 2026

This year's BPMA graduates were:

TPM

Courtney Chivers – Bizz Badge
 Tara Akkus – Bizz Badge
 Chloe Grimshaw – BPMA
 Braydon Lovegrove – IF Solutions
 Max Hindley – IF Solutions
 Megan Axon – IF Solutions
 Julia Zielinska – Initials Incentives
 Evie Cox – Merchandise Ltd
 Grace Derby – Merchandise Ltd
 Jamielee Danells – Merch Express
 Cate Jones – Navillus Print Gifts
 Millie Rowlands – Navillus Print Gifts
 Yssabela Saaib – Navillus Print Gifts
 Ava Hodges – Pinksheep
 Alastair Malone – Premier Print
 & Promotions
 Jack Coulson – Premier Print & Promotions
 Shannon Lloyd – Preseli
 Caroline Brocklehurst – Promo Memento
 Chloe Williams – Promo Memento



Jie Hunter-Moir
 was one of three Ross
 Promotional graduates

Dani Chapman – Promo Memento
 Jodie Dresser – Promo Memento
 Alana Wilson – Ross Promotional
 Ellie McNamee – Ross Promotional
 Jie Hunter-Moir – Ross Promotional
 Maisie Cooper – Wild Thang
 Stacey Kirk – Wild Thang
 Jodie-Anne Jeffrey – Willsmer Wagg

CPM

Sarah-Louise Harris – Merchandise Ltd
 Becky Ferguson – Pinksheep

TPM & CPM

Megan King – T King Associates



Jamielee Danells of Merch Express
 celebrates her TPM

certificate and officially graduate from the BPMA's Education Programme.

Jamielee Danells, sales and marketing executive, Merch Express said graduating from the BPMA TPM Programme was a milestone.



Navillus Print Gifts had three
 graduates in the Class of '26

"At 39, I decided it was never too late to keep learning and investing in my professional development," The programme has given me a much deeper understanding of the promotional merchandise industry, from product knowledge and sourcing to branding, sustainability and delivering the very best solutions for customers."

She added: "I'm excited to put everything I've learned into practice at Merch Express, continuing to help businesses find creative, high-quality branded merchandise that leaves a lasting impression. Here's to continuing to learn, grow and embrace new opportunities."

Three Navillus Print Gifts' staff also graduated. Richard Sullivan, owner congratulated team members, Cate Jones, Millie Rowlands and Yssabela Saaib.

"It's days like these that make all the difference, taking time to come together as an industry and celebrate what we all do best," he said.

PROFESSIONAL INVESTMENT

For the graduates, the ceremony was the finale after months of hard work studying for BPMA qualifications that provide a grounding in the techniques and

processes involved in creating merchandise led campaigns.

The BPMA Education Programme is an online professional development programme tailored to the promotional merchandise sector, created and written by industry experts, and open to BPMA members only.

Courses are CPD accredited with the Association for Accredited Learning and currently offer two levels:

- Trained in Promotional Merchandise (TPM)
- Certified in Promotional Merchandise (CPM)

TPM level is the most popular course, offering learners a wide selection of study materials that are fundamental to the promotional merchandise industry.

Learners are expected to study all Mandatory content, including such topics as artwork, sustainable merchandise, ethical trading, and the history of merchandise, before selecting a further six pieces of content from the Elective category. This allows learners to drill deeper into areas of specific interest.



Study is online through a series of video and PDF content, with a selection of webinars made available to the learners to further enhance their learning experience.

Those who pass the TPM can continue their professional development journey with the CPM qualification, which is aimed at promotional merchandise professionals with a minimum of three years' industry experience.

Course content is also a mix of Mandatory and Elective elements, with four course

intakes available in January, April, July and October.

Following the formal ceremony for this year's graduates cocktails were served and celebrations and networking continued into the early evening.

For those interested in being part of next year's contingent, details of BPMA Education Programme are available at bpma.talentlms.com, or contact education@bpma.co.uk.

'LEARNING NEVER STOPS...'

PINKSHEEP

"Ava Hodges and Becky Ferguson celebrated their graduation at the BPMA 2026 Graduation Ceremony. A fantastic achievement and a reflection of the time and effort they've both put into developing their knowledge of our industry.

Ava graduated with her Trained in Promotional Merchandise (TPM) qualification, while Becky achieved Certified in Promotional Merchandise (CPM), the next step for experienced merchandise professionals.

At Pinksheep, we're big believers that learning never stops. The more we invest in our people, the better we can support our clients with ideas, expertise and service that make a real difference."



Pinksheep boss, Billy Gubby congratulates Ava Hodges and Becky Ferguson

MERCHANDISE LTD

"A very proud moment for the Merchandise Ltd team.

Grace, Evie and Sarah attended the 2026 BPMA Graduation Ceremony at the Terrace Pavilion, House of Commons, where their professional achievements were formally recognised.

Grace and Evie have both completed the BPMA TPM qualification, while Sarah has achieved the advanced CPM qualification. These qualifications reflect a real commitment to learning, professional development and maintaining high standards within the promotional merchandise industry."

WILD THANG

"It's moments like this that make all the hard work over the past 30 years worthwhile. We are incredibly proud that our colleagues Stacey Kirk and Maisie Cooper attended this year's BPMA graduation ceremony at the House of Commons, celebrating an amazing milestone as they both officially became TPM qualified.

It was an extra special moment for Wild Thang, representing two different generations of growth within our business. Stacey is one of our most experienced team members, having started as a 16-year-old apprentice nearly

20 years ago and now helping lead our fantastic sales team, while Maisie is one of our youngest rising stars with an incredibly bright future ahead.

We have been members of the BPMA for 25 years, and now as proud Northern Ambassadors, we believe strongly in the importance of training, continuous improvement and inspiring the next generation to see the incredible career opportunities available within the merchandise industry. Investing in people has always been central to The Wild Thang way, helping both individuals and the business grow together."

RICHARD SULLIVAN, OWNER NAVILLUS

"Congratulations to our colleagues Yssabela, Millie, and Cate for all passing their TPM qualifications. We are very proud of your hard work and dedication.

We had a wonderful day celebrating with fellow graduates of The BPMA's Education Programme. We also met many of the behind-the-scenes teams from across the UK. Well done to all of you.

It's days like these that make all the difference, taking time to come together as an industry and celebrate what we all do best."

BPMA EDUCATION PROGRAMME

**Last 2026 intake,
October, now open**

Join hundreds of promotional merchandise professionals and gain a CPD accredited qualification through the BPMA's Education Programme

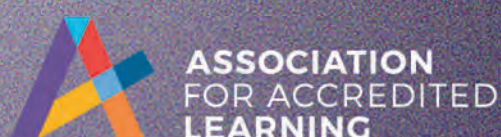
Two levels available:

- Trained in Promotional Merchandise
- Certified in Promotional Merchandise



Enrolment includes 6 month access to the online platform, mandatory and elective modules, a final exam and factory visit opportunities.

**To enrol and for more information,
simply email education@bpma.co.uk**



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IN DEMAND

Sourcing City's mid-year data report reveals what merch UK distributors are looking for

Every click through enquiry on Sourcing City represents a professional distributor actively selecting a product to present to a real customer.

It's not a survey or a stocking recommendation, but a live purchasing decision. In 2025, there were 675,000 of them powering Sourcing City's third industry white paper analysis and the findings challenge a few comfortable assumptions.

CLASSICS ON TOP

The data does not show a diversification from core categories. Rather, it shows a market doubling down: bags grew 11.1% year on year; pens grew 19.7%, a sports drink bottles grew 23%. These are not legacy products clinging on but the backbone of distributor activity, and the numbers are moving in one direction.

THE EDGES ARE MOVING FAST

At the same time, a category of products is growing at a pace the headline numbers do not capture. Power banks grew 37%; fans grew 35.9%, and chargers grew 20.4%. These are products that follow people out of the office and into their day and distributors are reaching for them in increasing numbers.



EXPECT ECO

Sustainability is no longer a trend, it is the baseline. Eco friendly ideas has led every themed group ranking for three consecutive years. In 2025 it generated 130,069 CT enquiries – 15% year on year growth.



The 2026 white paper contains observations drawn from six months of live platform activity proving dynamic insight to what the market wants. Sports items, for instance, are up 19.2% for 2025 with a further 9.8% forecast for 2026. Enquiries for travel related items (up 4% in 2026) and beach, BBQ, and picnic merch (up 3%) show momentum towards outdoor, active and experiential activities. And although the LA Olympics is not until 2028, there is a forecast 4.8% growth forecast for 2026 with interest in all things sporty continuing.

Sourcing City's White Paper No. 03 is free and open access, available to any distributor, supplier, or trade professional at sourcingcity.co.uk/whitepapers/675k-buying-decisions

CREATION

CORVO BOTTLE

COOLER DRINKS. HOTTER ADVENTURES.

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DRINK HAPPY. LIVE BOLD. REPEAT.



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Keeps your drinks chilled all day long.



HOT STUFF FOR 12H

Perfectly warm drinks whenever you need them.



LEAK-PROOF & WORRY-PROOF

Toss it in your bag. We've got you covered.



BUILD BETTER FOR YOU & THE PLANET

High quality, long lasting and kind to the planet.

PROMOTRADE



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WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

THE **NOVELLA** COLLECTION

Whether for personal use or to express your brand, Novella enables you to create a notebook that is entirely your own.

From selecting your cover decoration and print style, to adding your logo or artwork and choosing the perfect internal layout, every element can be tailored to your needs.



Fully customisable
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Full colour edge-to-edge printing



Available in both virgin and recycled versions





IT JUST WORKS

If end users need reminding of what merch brings to an organisation, we can suggest a few reasons

Merchandise specialist Brand Addition celebrated its 40th anniversary with a global party that included an anniversary gift bag. Designed following employee surveys and research, the stylish gift included BA branded items that were functional, useful and desirable, such as a tote, cap, water bottle and power bank.

In the age of digital, brands and their customers crave forms of advertising that convey content authentically. Away from their screens, they want direct, real-life contacts, sensory touchpoints and individual means of expression. Merchandise provides all of this plus the added advantage of no ad blockers. You can't click away from your favourite coffee mug, a stylish notebook, or a comfortable hoodie. It's for these reasons that merch is so appreciated, and why it is the only form of advertising that recipients say thank you for and may actually pay for.

A report by Haptica Live came up with compelling arguments for the use of merch. Here are their top reasons for using merch. **Emotion** – merch has an emotional effect on people. It can surprise, evoke joy, pleasure and even desire. Research by the German promotional products association, GWW found the emotional impact of merchandise in terms of attractiveness, relevance and popularity is much higher than for a successful TV spot. **Even Gen Z turn on** – 80% of the cohort in a study said that merch was "a good thing" and two thirds of these digital natives said they

would use items received. They love merch. **Usefulness** – the best merch slips seamlessly into the day to day routine of recipients providing a solution to a real need, while also looking cool. A perfect example is Prodir's MC01 aluminium connector, a keyring or lanyard clip that demands attention. **Conversation starters** – promotional items catch the eye of people and get them talking. Why not make it about your brand? **Cost effective** – all marketers want to know about the ROI of their spend and merch has one of the best stories to tell. The ASI Ad

Impression research found that multiplier effects and longevity of merch put costs in the fraction of cents per view.

Tangibility – in Europe, they call it haptic advertising and claim that touching something makes it familiar. In marketing, this creates a sense of connection, attracts attention, increases purchase intent and triggers a sense of ownership.

Sustainability – you can't get away from the S-word, and merch doesn't try to. The sector has embraced the challenge of merch that does good and rejects the idea that it has to mean 'plastic tat'. Well considered merchandise can align with progressive corporate values, make an impact, and not cost the planet.

A study by 5ltoCarbonZero found that, measured by emissions per brand recall, promotional products rank second only to outdoor advertising. Per impression, promotional merchandise generates up to eight times fewer CO2 emissions than digital advertising.

It's IRL – promotional items can go anywhere and put brands in the real-life situations where consumers are to be found, making brands familiar and relevant.

Long-lasting – branded items hang around and keep delivering their message long after other media have disappeared. GWW found that two thirds of recipients used an item for over a year, and 40% for more than two years.

Deliver sales – free gifts work better at building sales than discounts, with a study finding that the perceived value of gifts is 2.4 times greater than its cost.

...and build brands – Polish merch association PIAP found that 91% of companies use branded items to build their image. Little wonder that merch specialist Brand Addition created a stylish collection of items to celebrate its own 40th anniversary recently (see p10).

As MD, Michelle Thieret explained: "After 40 years of helping brands tell their stories through merchandise, it was fun to see our own brand brought to life in such a creative way."

Memorability – merch leaves a lasting impression. A PPAI consumer study found a recall rate of 90%, while the Promotional Products Effectiveness Study by GWW measured recall of 78%.

Bespoke brand – can't find what you want in a catalogue? Don't worry. If you can think of it, it can probably be created with low print runs, custom products, personalisation and creative packaging meaning that merch can really stand out and be bang on-brand.

These are some of the reasons that merch just works, but every brand will discover its own.

FOCUS ON THE PRODUCTS

Every year, the BPMA's Product Awards shine a light on the most creative and innovative items. Let's take a look at what caught the judges' attention.

Apparel – clothing is one of the biggest and fastest growing sectors in merch. Increasingly it means promotional clothing that doesn't necessarily look like promotional clothing. Wearers no longer want to look like a walking billboard but aspire to high street style.

Stormtech's RX-2 Vertex Stormshell jacket ran out as winner in 2026, while Kingly's Elite Premium Classic Crew socks and Neutral's Fairtrade organic quarter zip sweatshirt showed how classics can still inspire.



Bag & folders – bags tick the box for usefulness and remain an impressive growth area. Bagco's Wye recycled backpack is part of a range covering everyday, work, travel and leisure. Bags for tech needs are an emerging sector and Oldeani has this covered with a pop up gadget case. Meanwhile, Goldstar took on security issues among other things with its RFID protected Coastal Threads Repreve dual carry sling bag.



Drinkware – one of the standout products of recent years was First Editions' Foamo reusable cup, created in Britain and picking up Platinum in the BPMA awards. There has been further innovation displayed by the Chili Concept Calypso double walled drinking glass and Agua's Iconic glass bottle. Proof that the drinks sector is still liquid.



Stationery and writing – despite our screen-based world, a cursive approach still matters, which is why notebooks and pens are still in demand as promotional items.

Sustainability rules in the notebook world, with all the winners in the BPMA stationery category demonstrating green virtues, Bagco's Maxton sugarcane notebook is made using organic waste, as is Castelli's Appeel Ortisei option. Meanwhile, the Castelli Shiro 100% is recycled.



Likewise, pens have gone green, with Hainenko's Baron Extra recycled 'Tour of Italy' collection named Platinum winner at the BPMA Product Awards. BIC Graphic Europe Media Clic Ecolutions Plus demonstrates that reliability and sustainability can mix, while Pencom's Seashell ball pen is a fundraiser for a deserving educational charity (see p13).

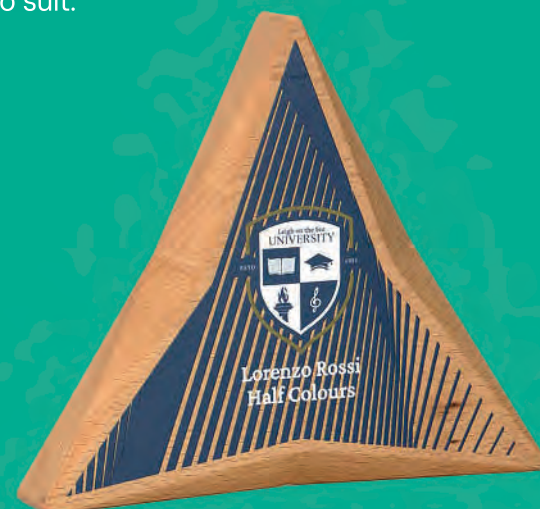
Technology – gadgets are one of the fastest growing and most dynamic sectors in merch, and cover a multitude of options. Tech now touches on so many areas of our lives as products such as Xoopar's Aura white noise speaker, Calverley's branded tile, and Oldeani's GAN travel adapter prove. Every month brings further innovation and creativity.

And there's more – let's not forget the other categories that merch covers. Edibles is an underappreciated area that can deliver a real wow factor. Confectionery specialists The Sweet People swept the board at the Product Awards with their eco vegan treat packs, Jelly Beans, and British made milk chocolate bars.



Health, travel and leisure are covered by products as varied as CHX Products' Walletmate collection, Regal Toys' Catherine II eco bear and WCM&A's bamboo ice scraper.

Whatever the need, there is a product to suit.



BIG SHOWS VENUES IDEAS

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Nothing compares to real life and live events, so register now and get engaged! The BIG Promotional Trade Shows are the *only* merchandise industry events this autumn.

CHANGE OF VENUE!



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10AM-3PM*

MANCHESTER

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15 OCT 2026
10AM-3PM*

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Lunch'n'Meet

At 2pm, the exhibition floor will pause for our Lunch'n'Meet networking buffet – the perfect opportunity to connect with exhibitors, catch up with industry peers, and spark new business conversations.

WE'LL KEEP YOU FUELLED throughout the morning with complimentary breakfast rolls, pastries, and biscuits.

Meet the Boss

GO STRAIGHT TO THE TOP

Meet the business owners and senior leaders from our exhibitors as they join their teams on the exhibition floor. It's your chance to ask questions, explore opportunities, and build relationships with the people making the decisions. Look out for our Meet the Boss highlights before the show and on the day.

BPMA

HEAR FROM THE EXPERTS

The BPMA will host a series of insightful talks on key industry topics throughout the day, at Manchester with the full programme coming soon. BPMA representatives will also be on hand at both the Manchester and Heathrow events for one-to-one conversations and industry catch-ups.

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07 OCT 2026
9AM-3PM*

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08 OCT 2026
10AM-4PM*

BASILDON

Holiday Inn, Festival Leisure Park, SS14 3DG

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These shows are closed trade events. Only bona fide distributors and resellers of business gifts, promotional merchandise and printwear may attend. Suppliers, manufacturers and their affiliates and all service providers must exhibit to be able to attend. *Last admission 1 hour before close. **Terms & conditions apply see website for details.

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MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

From fidget poppers and pens to building schools and providing inclusive employment, Laltex and Seashell Trust have come a long way

Merchandise users who buy fidget toys and pens from supplier Laltex are helping raise money for a national charity that supports young people with some of the most complex needs and learning disabilities in the country.

Laltex has been working with the Seashell Trust for more than 20 years, and the merchandise collection is just one way that it helps the organisation.

It started with a cardboard charity collection box for spare change to support the charity. Seashell was fairly close to Laltex so the company decided to deliver its donation in person.

According to CEO Sanjay Mulchand, this was the start of a long and mutually fulfilling relationship.

"We asked for a tour and were blown away by the incredible facilities, the dedication of the staff and, above all, the exceptional care, education and opportunities provided to the children and young adults at Seashell," he says.

GET INVOLVED

The Seashell Trust is a national charity that provides holistic educational and residential services, plus health and accessible sports to young people with some of the most complex needs and learning disabilities in the country.

From donations, Sanjay and Laltex got more involved, sitting on Seashell's Appeal board, being an ambassador, volunteering within its school, working with the children, as well as helping the fundraising team.

Laltex has supported several capital projects, including the construction of 17 residential houses where students live on site, a new school and a new college.



Laltex CEO
Sanjay Mulchand
and King Charles

Team members have embraced countless fundraising challenges including the Yorkshire Three Peaks, Dragon boat racing and skydives. Laltex's 'Legend Leave' scheme gives team members time to volunteer at Seashell where they've helped with its inclusive sports camp, CADS, as well as gardening and other activities.

A natural next step was to use its expertise in promotional products to create items that could support the charity, and this led to the launch of the Seashell Fidget Popper and the Seashell Ball Pen, with a contribution made to Seashell Trust from every item sold.

As well as raising money, the items have helped raise awareness of Seashell Trust with businesses and organisations across the UK.

For many years Laltex has offered work experience to Seashell students but in 2018 it went further and offered paid employment to students after they left college.

"We genuinely believe that as a business we have both the opportunity and obligation to do as much good as we can," says Sanjay. "Through our 'One Family' values this includes creating an inclusive workplace where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of the barriers they may face."



MEANINGFUL WORK

The company is a keen advocate of inclusive employment. "The impact goes far beyond the individual joining our team. It brings new skills, perspectives and experiences into our workplace, enriches our wider team and strengthens our business and our connection with the community around us," he adds.

For its Supported Employment Programme and its commitment to creating meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities, Laltex won the Kings Award for Enterprise this year.

Carol Townsend, mother of Robert who was previously a student at Seashell and is now employed by Laltex, says the experience has been transformative.

"We are so grateful and extremely appreciative of everything that Laltex has done for Robert to enable his continued employment, and also for the care and kindness that he is always shown by everyone. His life would be completely different with no focus or structure without his time at Laltex and his circle of friends would be extremely limited," she says.

Laltex wants to increase its Supported Employment Programme, creating more opportunities for young adults with learning disabilities to gain meaningful employment and develop valuable workplace skills.

It remains committed to raising both funds for and awareness of Seashell's work. It is helping to build a special needs school in Africa and exploring how to help train its teachers.

In future, Laltex will increase the range of Seashell promotional products and hopes its loyal trade customers will continue to promote these to their end users.



SUMMER OF DEALS

M&A activity has centred on the German market while suppliers have added new brands to their range

Two major writing instrument brands have combined after Pagani Pens SA acquired Senator GmbH on 1 August 2026.

The transaction creates one of the leading groups in the European promotional writing instruments industry, bringing together two premium brands, Prodir and Senator with a view to expand their international market presence.

Prodir will focus on the premium segment, with a strong emphasis on design, innovation, sustainability and Swiss-made quality. Senator will be developed as a reliable, high-quality and competitive player



for volume projects and personalised promotional writing instruments.

It secures the future of Senator, which underwent insolvency proceedings

this year, and preserves production in Germany with 120 jobs.

Both brands will continue to operate independently. Prodir maintains its own manufacturing facilities in Switzerland.

Rossana Porotti, chief operating officer and co-managing director of Pagani Pens SA said: "We firmly believe that industrial know-how and manufacturing capabilities are strategic assets that must be preserved. This acquisition enables us to safeguard valuable expertise, maintain production close to our customers and support highly skilled employment in Europe."

GEIGER GROWS

In two further German deals, Geiger GmbH has acquired two promotional products distributors: GP Werbemittel and pro-promotion.

These are Geiger GmbH's 16th and 17th in the



German market, further strengthening its full-service promotional products offering.

The acquisitions reinforce Geiger's growth strategy, combining both organic and acquisition-driven expansion.

With more than 140 employees in Germany, Geiger GmbH also serves customers in Luxembourg and Switzerland.

OUTDOOR CHOICE

Meanwhile, The Outdoors Company has added four new brands to its portfolio of performance garments.



Cotopaxi, Didriksons, Peak Performance and Peak Design will provide businesses with greater choice when sourcing premium products for branded workwear, employee rewards, gifting and promotional merchandise, the company claims.



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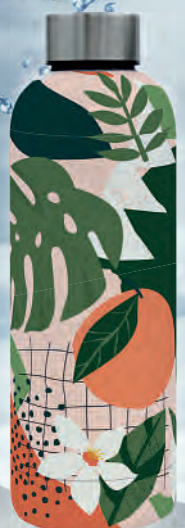
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BRAND EXPANSION

Impression Europe strengthens its UK & Ireland presence with the addition of the Clipper Interall range

Trade supplier, Impression Europe has added 49 new brands to its range after being appointed as exclusive UK and Irish supplier of the Clipper Interall range.

From September 2026, the Essex-based business will supply the brands, including Belkin, Sudio, Kambukka, Popsockets, and Contigo.

The latest expansion brings the total number of products available through Impression Europe to more than 2,500, further strengthening its position as a major UK

supplier for promotional merchandise.

Josh Stephenson, director at Impression Europe said the move brought an established and highly recognised name in the promotional products market to its existing product assortment.

“We are delighted to be expanding our range with the addition of Clipper Interall. The brand has a strong reputation within the UK promotional merchandise market and we are excited to make the range available to our customers as part of our existing portfolio.”

As part of the expanded offering, the newly added range will be supported by the same dedicated approach, product expertise and responsive service that customers have come to expect from Impression Europe, he added.

Clipper Interall products will be available exclusively through Impression Europe in the UK and Ireland from 1st September 2026.

Clipper Interall is a leading European supplier of promotional products. The Dutch company has operated since 1945, providing promotional products and solutions for customers across Europe.



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MERCH BY DESIGN

Experience agency Heaps + Stacks has launched merch as a standalone service

Brands are turning to bespoke merchandise to add another dimension to their marketing campaigns.

Netflix, cosmetics brands Benefit and Rare Beauty, and luxury hotel group, BHC, are just some of the brands that are making merch a central pillar of their marketing.

"Merch isn't just stuff. It's culture, community, and connection – designed to create belonging, amplify a narrative, and drive tangible moments to be treasured," says Keziah Wildsmith, founder of experiential agency Heaps + Stacks.

The agency counts brands such as Diet Coke, Laneige, Longchamp, and Miu Miu as clients, and Wildsmith says that they are increasingly looking at every touchpoint with their consumers, from IRL experiences, launches and pop-ups, to product-drop mailers, and influencer outreach.

Merchandise, done right, is one of the most potent tools available to brands, and has been rising up the agenda, says Wildsmith

"The bar has just been raised so high now, and brands want to lean in and have a piece of ownable space within people's lives by creating useful merch that shows up as their brand."

GAME, SET, MERCH

To support the opening of its new property, The Cooper, hotel group BHC created a VIP hospitality experience in the grounds of its hometown tennis tournament, the Charleston Open. The women's tournament is one of the most prestigious in the world, and the oldest women's tournament in America.

Heaps + Stacks created Hotel Coco, a retreat for guests of the tournament, who could enjoy drinks and food in a relaxing setting. Guests were also able to select from a range of specially produced merchandise gifts that was designed to mirror the old world charm of the hotel and the tournament.

The agency also created a custom rugby shirt for Selena Gomez's beauty brand



(Left to right) BHC, Rare Beauty and Netflix have bought into bespoke merch

Rare Beauty. The collectible item was exclusively available from various pop-ups around the world.

A range of projects for Netflix has included special merchandise for its coverage of boxing,

to be gifted to talent, press and creators. A wider premium tier also included limited water bottles, fight night T-shirts, rain jackets, Netflix fleeces, and scarves, designed to be worn, shared and remembered.

According to Wildsmith, savvy brands are increasingly exploring the use of merch.

"The concept isn't new but it has become a lot more trendy. It's being done in a way that's very thoughtful and doesn't feel tokenistic – just a logo slapped on a water bottle. Special, beautiful items can elevate the brand and act as another point of messaging."

Heaps + Stacks has responded by launching merch as a standalone service for experiential clients and those who just want a bespoke item.

Merch is an area with particular requirements throughout the supply chain and the agency has built a team to hand hold clients who may be new to the world of promotional branded items.

MORE THAN A LOGO

"We're not the partner for a simple logo on a water bottle but if you want to create something super bespoke, but have no idea how to do it, then that's our sweet spot – being able to come back with a range of options that links into that consumer and their lifestyle," she says.

"We've built up the team this year with people who are good at sourcing and finding the right suppliers and the right specialists, plus product development, product design. And then there are packaging experts because mailing is a big part of merch too with fulfilment, and shipping."

"We've been doing this quietly for years for some of the best brands in the world. Now we're ready to be loud and proud about it," adds Wildsmith.

MVIA's Czechia warehouse handles core JD merch



SMOOTH DELIVERY

Jack Daniels' owner Brown Forman is streamlining merch distribution with a new global platform

Global drinks company Brown-Forman is to centralise distribution of its merchandise and POS materials across Europe, Africa, and Asia by implementing a new, digital ordering platform.

The Jack Daniels brand owner will use the system to handle a programme covering six merch categories: barware, drinkware, giftpacks, giveaways and promotional items, signage, and branded clothing.

Brown-Forman has appointed Czech company MVIA to oversee supply chain logistics and distribution of merchandising and POS materials for 16 brands. As well as Jack Daniels, the company brands include Diplomático Rum, Gin Mare, and Herradura.

A collaboration agreement will see the MVIA HUB platform introduced to unify the order and payment processing and distribution management of merch and POS materials, streamlining collaboration between regional and local teams.

RELIABLE EXECUTION

Valentina Schiavoni, director – regional procurement & POS Europe, Africa & Asia Pacific at Brown-Forman, said the platform would allow standardisation of fulfilment, smoothing the ordering process and coordinating every step from warehousing to final distribution.

"Merchandise and POS materials are important to our market strategy. As we scale

our cooperation across regions, we require a solution that delivers clarity, reliability and practical execution for both our regional and local teams."

The central platform will benefit Brown-Forman by providing better visibility and control over orders, costs and delivery. Consolidated purchasing will lower unit costs and minimum order quantities, while maintaining consistent product quality and branding. Centralised reporting and a more efficient procurement process is a further benefit.

MVIA picked up the business following an international tender. It already runs similar merchandise and POS programmes for global clients, including Coca-Cola, Carlsberg and Asahi. Each set-up is tailored to the client's needs and may combine stock, buying windows, warehousing, fulfilment and global distribution.

The company developed its first online solution for promotional item management for Coke in 2004, at a time when fax-based ordering was the norm.

Jiří Smejkal, CEO of MVIA said: "This collaboration allows us to fully deploy the comprehensive enterprise capabilities of the MVIA HUB platform to support complex multi-regional fulfilment workflows. Projects like this help us demonstrate the robustness of our solutions at a truly multinational level."



MVIA owners Jiri Smejkal and Tomas Bedan



TAILORED PROGRAMME

The first phase of the cooperation will focus on taking over and managing merch and

POS inventory, fulfilment, and distribution to participating regions. During this phase, MVIA will provide logistical support for Brown-Forman brands across several product categories.

A second phase will include further development of the MVIA HUB platform and the implementation of so-called buying windows while Brown-Forman continues to independently control and retain all procurement and vendor tendering and selection functions.

A hybrid set-up will have selected core and frequently ordered items stored in MVIA's warehouse in Czechia from where they can be ordered continuously.

Other campaign-specific or higher-volume items are produced after orders from different markets are consolidated through buying windows. MVIA also manages the related warehousing, logistics and fulfilment.

Products will support hospitality and on-trade venues, retail activations, consumer promotions and gifting.

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ENTITLED OR MISUNDERSTOOD?

In the first of a series of articles for Merch Magazine, leadership specialist, David Haylor addresses the challenges of managing multi-generational expectations

As those who saw my presentation at the recent BPMA conference will know, there is often a lot of misunderstanding between younger and older generations in the workplace.

I am a supporter of our younger colleagues, but appreciate that such tensions can be challenging when it comes to leading teams.

In addressing these issues, it is important to grasp what is going on and understand some of the underlying context that creates it.

So, what's the problem?

When I walk into any room to discuss this topic, I ask the audience for one word which defines Gen Z (born 1997 to 2012).

It's a long list but the number one, by far, is "entitled".

Now, let's be honest, the precise day, month, year any of us is born is irrelevant. For any individual, terms like Gen Z and Gen X are meaningless nonsense. If I went back and asked any audience over the last 2000 years what they thought of the younger generation I would likely get a similar response.

But... and it's a big one...

When we talk about leadership we need to step back and see the bigger picture and that bigger picture tells me that if I have 500 25-year-olds in a room and 500 50-year-olds, I can predict their average responses with great accuracy. Also, the times we live in are taking that natural older/younger generation perception gap and putting rocket fuel under the issues that separate us.

To name just some examples:

- **The cumulative pace of change.** Technological change, social change, political chaos, climate change, economic turmoil, the tectonic shift in the geo-political make-up of the world, Brexit, Covid... I could go on. All of this leaves organisations and individuals a little punch drunk. They find it hard to focus on the positive, the opportunity and

the constructive next step. Instead fear and anxiety defines a lot of long-term thinking and decision making.

- **Covid and lockdowns.** This is not a political point, simply a psychological observation. Gen Z in the workplace today were in their late teens to early 20s when they were locked down for the best part of two years. There is a lot of data on the impact of that but for now I will simply say that if you put any human being into a closed environment for more than 10% of their total lived experience and say, don't go out, don't take risks, stay safe; guess what happens? It has obviously dented their confidence levels, perception of risk and willingness to move outside of their comfort zone.

- **AI.** Gen Z is the generation seeing a technology whose algorithms are being used to run up to two interview stages for large firms, to run dating apps, and, in their perception at least, take jobs. Unemployment is running at approximately 16% for 18- to

24-year-olds and they face rejection and fear of the future with a bot telling them they're not good enough.

- **Economic reality.** Gen Z have never seen a boom – they have only ever seen stagnation and recession. They don't expect to buy a house, many can't afford rent away from home, and they doubt they can ever afford a family. They certainly don't expect to be better off than their parents. That influences what you believe you can aspire to, what motivates you and your response when your director tells you to work harder.

All of this leads to a workplace where the older generation expect the younger generation to work as they did, to follow the old rules, to sign up to the same social contract. Whereas the younger generation are asking 'is it worth it'? Why should they think otherwise? And who was it who rigged the system against them?

All of this has damaged all our belief in future potential, but especially so for Gen Z. Most importantly it has broken their trust in authority, in the systems around them and the older generation who have made all the decisions in their young lives.

Frankly, would you trust us given the seeming mess we appear to be making of everything?

However, I am an optimist, honestly. There are brilliant people and teams who are taking the above context finding the positive and the opportunity and leading the charge for all of us.

In my next piece, I'll talk about the solution and how we replicate the energy, creativity and high performance that some of your teams already have.

There are reasons to be positive, I promise!

David Haylor is CEO of Haylor Leadership, a specialist in maximising the potential of teams ■





Discover What's New...

B FOR BUSINESS

Pinksheep is the latest merch company to become a B Corp. What does it mean for the sector?

Promotional merchandise end-users are increasingly looking to independent verification of the social and environmental credentials of their suppliers.

Merchandise company, Pinksheep has built on a reputation for sustainable merchandise solutions by completing an 18-month assessment to be certified as a B Corporation.

The process dovetails with Pinksheep's existing commitment to help clients make more informed merchandise decisions, which has been a cornerstone of the business since its inception in 2013.

Pinksheep, which works with brands such as Octopus Energy, Starling Bank, Uber, and Vaillant, saw B Corporation status as an obvious next step for the business.



only about 2,700 B Corps in the UK which has 5.4 million registered companies.

Corporate clients in particular are putting their supplier base under the microscope when it comes to their own ESG agendas. Those companies whose policies and ethics align with those of corporations can find procurement a more welcoming environment.

This alignment of values with like-minded clients, partners and suppliers may also help with recruitment issues that affect the merchandise sector, says Law.

"We hope it will attract talent to us as well. People like account managers are actually quite difficult to find in our industry. B Corp positions us really well in that respect."

Despite the pushback seen in some areas on sustainability, the predominant direction of travel remains towards making more sustainable choices, he adds.

"In our own way, we have influenced the direction of travel that the industry is going on, and encouraged people to up their game. Back in the day, the sustainable choices were far worse quality and far more expensive. Now I would argue a lot of the key items we sell are better quality, and only marginally more expensive."

By offering transparency through Ora, which grades products on nine metrics, clients can make their own choice. Sometimes products that appear 'green' are less so than alternatives.

A cork pen might be sold as a sustainable item when it doesn't score well next to one that's made in a factory in Germany, powered by solar energy, using recycled, recyclable or biodegradable materials.

INFORMED CHOICE

"We present the choices and if people make a more sustainable choice, we reward them more heavily. For some products, like power banks, there isn't a sustainable option," he says.

Because B Corp standards are not static, and companies have to recertify every three years, Pinksheep is already looking forward to the next phase, which will include more in-depth tracking and analysis of CO2 and a continual focus on improving standards for social and environmental issues.

B-CORP BASICS

B Corporation status is a way of assessing how businesses balance profit and purpose.

Its methodology looks at key indicators of social and environmental performance, legality and transparency.

Companies are assessed across five areas: governance, workers, community, environment, and customers.

They must achieve a score of 80 or above to be awarded B Corp status.

Companies can lose B Corp status if they breach core values, and must recertify every three years.

INDEPENDENT VOICE

"Clients really like it – it's a powerful bit of kit," says Pinksheep director Phil Law. "But the problem we had was it was based on our words. Verification from B Corp backs up Pinksheep's claims. The accreditation is relatively rare among companies generally, and within merchandise, only a handful of businesses have it."

Alongside Ora and an Eco Vardis Platinum award, B Corp has proved to be a further piece of the sustainability jigsaw.

The assessment process, which was managed by fellow director Billy Gubby and HR manager Emma Perren, is incredibly thorough.

"There's a huge amount of due diligence in every aspect of the business, from commercial operations, ethics, sustainability, people and culture," says Law. "There's nothing else comparable, unless you were selling your business. It goes into that level of detail."

Despite a considerable investment in time and effort, Law says B Corp provides a genuine point of difference for businesses. There are

“YOUR WORD IS REALLY IMPORTANT IN THIS GAME...”

The industry may be changing but the strength of personal relationships remains paramount, Matt Dyl tells Jason O'Connor

JASON O'CONNOR:

You've been in the industry for seven or eight years? I know you came from a print background in South Africa. Tell us the journey you've been on to get here.

MATT DYL:

It's nine years in October. I went back to South Africa in 2009. I was 21, had finished college and decided to travel for a bit. I had a lot of fun out there and eventually needed to make some money.

I ended up at a print factory in Johannesburg – it was more large format print, so motorway billboards and stuff like that. I started on the factory floor, trimming PVC and welding billboards together, and then moved into the print facility, where I ran the machines. From there, I moved into the office and eventually became the production manager, which was a lot of fun. I then moved into the sales side, which I did for about two years.

At that point, I decided to work with one of my best friends. We ran a company in Johannesburg called Enigma Signs, which specialised in high-res digital print for shop fronts. It was completely different to what I'm into now but gave me a great foundation for print.

And then in 2018, I came back. I landed on the Sunday and started working for Tancia Group on the Monday. It's a family business and I've known the Cleeres since I was about 16 years old. I transferred a lot of the skills from the large format side over to promotional products – though there was still a lot to learn in the first year or two.

JOC: What did you come in as?

MD: National sales manager.

JOC: A day after landing? They had some faith in you!

MD: I had three sales reps underneath me. When I'd been with the company for 12 weeks, they gave me customer service too. So, it



was a baptism of fire, considering I didn't really know how the industry worked. I didn't understand the dynamics of the supplier-distributor relationship because I'd never worked in that model before – I'd always worked in B2C. It was interesting to say the least. Then I moved to head of sales about 18 months after I started.

JOC: Do you still get the same buzz as you did then? You're all or nothing, aren't you?

MD: I'm quite enthusiastic when it comes to driving sales – and yes, I'm playing that down somewhat. I get a real ***** buzz when we get an order in, whether it's for 1,000 pens or 10,000 bottles. If you've pitched a customer and they turn around and say “cool, I have faith in you”, you've done something. And then if you manage to grab hold of an account and grow it to a significant level, it's a huge achievement.

I still get the buzz every single time I'm out there, whether I'm at Merchandise World, at a tabletop event or in a meeting. I enjoy the sales process and I particularly enjoy the face-to-face side of things.

JOC: There are two sides to you, aren't there? You can hold a very professional meeting but also be the biggest class clown in the industry.

MD: I can mix with anybody. If you want to sit down and have a really strong, business-oriented conversation, we can have it. And if we have that meeting and come to agreements that are going to benefit both



companies, that's a fantastic meeting to have. And then, to say thank you, I'll take you out for a beer afterwards.

JOC: Come on now – it's never just one beer, is it? How much has the industry changed in those nine years?

MD: It has and it hasn't. I think the structure of the industry itself is still the same – the way it runs in terms of the supplier-distributor relationship.

From a product perspective, it's changed significantly. What we're being asked for now is very different to what we were being asked for pre-Covid. I think the days of people holding on to 250,000 pens in a store cupboard are over. People are putting more thought into what they're purchasing.

I think from a supplier-distributor side of things, the relationship is still the same. It's very traditional. I'm shocked every day at how small this industry is, but also how vast it is. I think relationships are probably one of the biggest factors in whether or not you're going to be successful. The model between suppliers and distributors can be easy, if you get it right – but if you mess it up, it can be dangerous.

JOC: 100%. It's like anything in life, isn't it? You could do 1,000 things right but you're judged on the one thing you do wrong. For us, it's important to know that if there's a problem, you'll fix it and there won't be an argument.

MD: If you're hard-nosed about helping a

distributor when something's gone wrong, you're putting future work at risk by not assisting your customer. Distributors bring us the work, so why wouldn't we support you where we can?

JOC: *I think there's a lot of short-sighted people. That whole conversation is bigger than just the problem itself – while I'm on the phone arguing with a supplier about why they're not going to fix a problem, the potential of our future relationship is dwindling with every word. I think some people don't see that.*

MD: Your word is really important in this game. If you say you're going to do something, do it. Five years ago, I had a meeting with you and you told me you were taking us off your website if we didn't fix problems. After that meeting, we gave you our word that we'd sort it – and we did. If you've made a commitment to something, you've got to get it done.

JOC: *How do you see the industry looking in five years time?*

MD: I don't think my answer will be very popular. To an end-user, I think the industry will look the same. But in the back-end, I think it will be very different.

Before I entered the industry, it was

dominated by specialists in specific fields. But those specialists are becoming few and far between now, and it means that distributors will have a bunch of generalist suppliers – and ultimately, what will set the generalists apart will be service, price and product offering. But I think the biggest one will be service.

You mentioned the Amazon model in a previous interview. That would be so risky, right? Because Amazon has created an unrealistic end-user expectation – yet I think the closer you get to that, the better off you'll be down the line. However, I have meetings with customers who tell me that their end-users will only deal with them because of their consultative approach, rather than the transactional in-and-out approach.

JOC: *Before I forget, what's the story behind Neil (Cleere, founder and MD of Tancia Group) and mouse mats? I heard years ago he was the first person to bring them into the industry?*

MD: I've heard the story 100 times, though I still don't fully know it. But he was the first person who brought mouse mats to the promo market. Someone – I can't remember who but I believe they're still in the industry – told him that mouse mats would never take off. And subsequently it went wild when he

first brought them to the industry – he later sold them off. So when he's in the boardroom, he'll tell people he invented the mouse mat.

JOC: *I think that's the version of the story I heard first...*

MD: That's where we're different from a lot of other suppliers out there. Neil is still present within our business every single day and he has a finger on everything in this building. He's grown it from a small company to the size we are now. And he's as invested today as he was all those years ago when he first opened the doors, which I think is a really good trait to have.

JOC: *I agree. Okay, final question. If you had a motto that details your mission at Tancia, what would it be?*

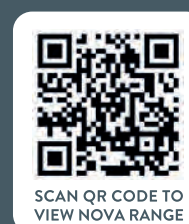
MD: Deliver the best items on the market – from both a product and print perspective – and do it with integrity. I believe that you should do everything with a good intention and if you do that, it will come back to you tenfold. That, and keep your customers happy.

Jason O'Connor is founder and MD at Total Merchandise. Matt Dyl is head of sales at Tancia Group ■

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SMART CLOTHING

Technological advances offer dazzling opportunities in the promotional textile arena, says Clive Allcott

Promotional clothing can be more than a workwear or a branded promotional item. It can communicate identity, culture, personality, social status, and personal values.

Over the last few years, advances in technology are changing the role of clothing once again. Intelligent clothing, combined with intelligent branding, can create new opportunities for the brands to connect with consumers.

WHAT IS INTELLIGENT CLOTHING?

Intelligent clothing, also called smart clothing or e-textiles, combines traditional fabrics with technology such as sensors, conductive fibres, microelectronics, and digital connectivity.



It can collect information, respond to its environment, or interact with the wearer.

For example, smart garments can monitor heart rate, body temperature, movement, breathing, and physical activity. With healthcare being a key choice when choosing promotional clothing, some garments can now regulate temperature, improve safety, or support medical monitoring. The benefits of these items mean that clothing can become an active part of a person's everyday technology.

INTELLIGENT BRANDING

It's not just the garment. Intelligent branding goes beyond printing or embroidering a logo or name on a product. It involves using technology, data, design, storytelling, and customer interaction to create a stronger relationship between a brand and its audience.

When intelligent branding is combined with smart clothing, the garment itself can become part of the brand experience. As a distributor your customers' brands could use smart labels, QR codes, NFC technology, digital

product passports, or connected fabrics to give their customers additional information.

For example, a customer could tap their smartphone against an intelligent label inside a garment and access information about the product's materials, manufacturing process, care instructions, authenticity, or sustainability credentials. This transforms a simple clothing label into a digital connection between the product, brand, and customer.



SUSTAINABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Intelligent branding can also support greater transparency in both the promotional and fashion industry. Consumers increasingly want to know where their clothes come from, and how they were produced.

An intelligent garment could contain a digital identity that records information about its materials, origin, production, and care. Customers could scan the garment to learn about its journey from raw material to end of life solutions.

This could encourage brands to become more transparent and help consumers make more informed purchasing decisions. Digital information could also support repair, resale, reuse, and recycling, helping extend the life of garments.

PERSONALISATION AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Within the promotional sector another major advantage of intelligent clothing and branding is personalisation. Technology can allow brands to understand how customers use their products and provide more relevant experiences.

For example, a fitness brand could offer personalised training information through smart sportswear, a fashion brand could provide recommendations based on a customer's preferences, a charity that uses a promotional garment could even interact with a smartphone application to offer donation information, product information, or exclusive content.



THE CHALLENGES

Although intelligent branding offers exciting opportunities, there are challenges. Smart clothing can be more expensive to produce because it requires additional materials and technology. Electronic components must also be durable, comfortable, and capable of surviving washing and everyday use.

There are also environmental concerns. Combining electronics with textiles can make garments more difficult to recycle.

Most importantly, technology should have a genuine purpose. Intelligent branding should not simply add technology for the sake of appearing innovative. The technology should provide real value to the customer while strengthening the identity and values of your customer's brand. DTB is receiving more requests for intelligent branding, showing that this technology is now in demand in the promotional sector both in branding and garment choice.

THE FUTURE

Intelligent clothing and branding creates a new concept of the garment as more than a physical product. A piece of clothing can now become a living brand touchpoint, connecting the customer to the company's story, services, community, and digital ecosystem throughout the product's life offering endless promotional gifting opportunities.

Clive Allcott is commercial director, DTB



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PSI ON TREND

The European merch showcase is moving home to Cologne for 2027. What's in store?

Change is in the air at European merchandise exhibition, PSI. The 2027 edition of the show has sharpened its focus with a stronger trend dimension, a new content format and a venue that matches its role as the European hub of haptic advertising.

Promoted as a strategic step to strengthen PSI's position as the home of the European promotional products industry, the show is moving to Cologne for the first time after six decades in Düsseldorf, and will feature several important changes.

New dates: PSI will be about a week later this year on 12–14 January 2027 to avoid the Christmas holidays and the early January public holiday period (Epiphany). This makes planning significantly easier for exhibitors and visitors across Europe.

New venue: Koelnmesse's Halls 7 and 8 will host the show. These modern, spacious and light-filled halls offer a clear layout, short walking distances and room for strong product presentations and future growth.

Multimedia content: The Boulevard, the generous connection between Halls 7 and 8, becomes the content hub of the show. A new multimedia format will feature expert discussions on key industry topics – from haptic advertising and sustainable supply chains to the interplay of analogue and digital customer experiences.

Better connections: Koelnmesse has its own long-distance railway station, Köln Messe/Deutz, with direct ICE connections across Germany and Europe. Paris is reachable in 3 hours and 20 minutes, Brussels in 1 hour and 50 minutes, Amsterdam in 2 hours and 40 minutes. Frankfurt Airport with its intercontinental flights is just 50 minutes away by train. The nearby airports of Cologne/Bonn and Düsseldorf add further continental connections.

Megatrends as a theme: For the first time, PSI places societal megatrends at the centre of the show. Boris Planer, an internationally recognised retail and trend expert with more than 25 years of experience analysing retail and consumer markets, will open PSI 2027 with a keynote exploring which societal, technological and economic trends will shape the industry in the years ahead.

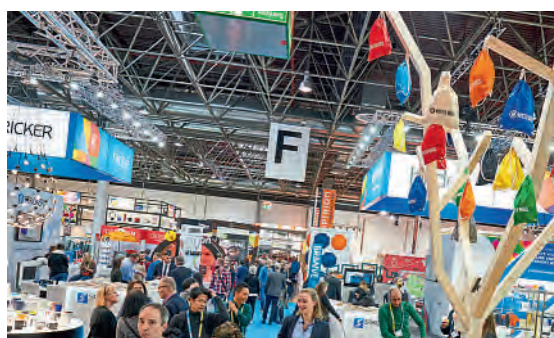
TRENDS RADAR

The Trend Show brings three megatrends to life: Health Shift, Safe Future and Urban Outdoor. These will be presented through attractive, attention-grabbing exhibition areas with a curated selection of promotional products, incentives and merchandising items that connect each megatrend with concrete applications.

For distributors and agencies, the Trend Show serves as a compact trend radar for product selection, campaign planning and customer projects.

The Textile Village remains a key feature at PSI, showcasing promotional textiles from branded collections to sustainable ranges and innovative finishing concepts.

Finishing and decoration formats position themselves as the 'workbench of the promotional products industry', with solutions for printing, engraving, personalisation and on-demand services.



CREATIVE COLOGNE

As a creative and media hub, Cologne is home to agencies, media houses and content and entertainment companies. This creates an environment where brand communication and campaign development are everyday business – an ideal setting for a show that puts haptic advertising centre stage.

The PSI Night on 12 January 2027 at the iconic Wartsaal am Dom is a must for every visitor. The legendary networking event moves to Cologne with the show and offers the European promotional products community an evening of connections, conversations and new partnerships – with a view of Cologne Cathedral.

MARKET FOR IDEAS

PSI remains Europe's leading trade show for promotional products, incentives and merchandising. It is the central marketplace and meeting point for manufacturers, suppliers, importers, distributors, agencies and marketing decision-makers working with promotional products, incentives and merchandising.

With more than 600 exhibitors and over 10,000 trade visitors from more than 60 countries expected, the PSI continues to be the strategic kick-off for the promotional products year.

For more information about the show, go to psi-network.de. ■

Local Support Contact Details

Please contact a member of our local support team for advice on any matter related to debt and credit management.

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THE MISSING HOURS

Merchandise quoting is stubbornly resistant to digitisation, but the costs are mounting says Charles Simmons

Ask a distributor how long a quote takes and most of them will pause. Ten minutes, maybe. Fifteen? The honest answer is nobody really knows, because nobody's ever timed it.

The client asks, the quote needs doing, and it takes as long as it takes. Whether that's pulling prices off a supplier website, copying them into your system, or picking up the phone and waiting for a call back, it just gets done. The time disappears into the day.

The problem isn't the quoting itself, it's the three to four minutes per product that are an inevitable part of the quote. It all adds up.

TIME THIEF

And nobody quotes one product at a time. A quote may run to three products, on average. Now take ten quotes, however long that takes you to put out, a day, a week, whatever your pace is. That's 30 products, 30 separate trips to a supplier site, 30 cut-and-paste jobs. It probably works out at between an hour-and-a-half and two hours, gone, before a single artwork proof has been sent or a client has said yes. Whatever your actual volume is, multiply from there.

I've been in this trade for 20 years. I built a promo business and sold it. And in all that time, this part of the job never got faster. The suppliers changed but the workflow, including finding the product, opening a new tab, transcribing the numbers by hand, stayed exactly the same. We just got used to it.

YOU'RE PAYING

If you put a price on this delay, then it suddenly gets attention. A company director on £70k a year is burning £55 to

£73 in time on every ten quotes, just on this one task, assuming they're doing the quoting themselves, which plenty of owner-operators still are. Hand it to an employee on £40k and it's £31 to £42 per ten quotes.

Small numbers, until you multiply them by however many quotes you actually put out in a year. For a lot of businesses that's into five figures every year, for typing out information that already exists on someone else's website, into your own system.

And that's the conservative version. It assumes every product is single-sourced, every supplier site behaves, and nobody has to double back because the first price they found was out of date. Anyone who's actually quoted for a living knows the real number runs higher.

"The industry will negotiate a fraction of per cent and call it a win... but we'll absorb hours of unpaid, unbilled admin without blinking"

FALSE ECONOMY

Here's what gets me. This industry will negotiate a fraction of a per cent off a supplier's net price and call it a win. Rightly so, margin matters. But we'll absorb hours of unpaid, unbilled admin time every week without blinking, because it's always been part of

the job. We treat the supplier discount as a lever to pull and the quoting process as something we just put up with. It isn't. It's a workflow, and workflows can be redesigned.

Every other industry that's digitised has done it by killing the manual look-up first. Retail killed it with barcode scanning. Logistics killed it with tracking integrations. Distributors are still doing it the way we did it in 2005, tab open, numbers copied, fingers crossed the pricing is up to date.

So, here's the question worth considering: if you costed out every hour your team spent on supplier look-ups this year, would the number embarrass you, or would it just confirm what you already suspected and chose not to confront?



Charles Simmons is founder of Job MGT, an automation platform for promotional merchandise companies

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IT'S NOT ABOUT THE GADGET

Promotional tech doesn't get the thumbs up just for being new. Matt Pluckrose explains how to assess its impact

After nearly 30 years working with promotional technology, I've seen the category change beyond recognition. We've gone from fairly basic plastic gadgets to USB sticks to modem cables to products that sit right alongside the technology people choose to buy for themselves. As consumer technology has changed over the years the best promotional tools have changed with it.

And I think that distinction is important.

Because today, the benchmark for a successful promotional tech product shouldn't simply be: "Will someone use it?"

It should be: "Will someone actually want to keep it?"

For me, there are four things increasingly driving that decision: sustainability, design, personality and function.

SUSTAINABILITY EXPECTED

A few years ago, recycled materials were a genuine point of difference and a reason to sell, market and promote a tech item. Today, they're increasingly a given – it's the starting point and expected from buyers. In meetings I attend the materials used are not the first thing to discuss. Rather, it's about what the product delivers for the user – in terms of speed, power, branding or innovation.

Recycled aluminium, recycled plastics, natural materials, reduced and FSC packaging and more considered materials should simply be part of the brief.

That doesn't mean sustainability has become less important. Quite the opposite. It means our industry needs to move beyond using it as the only reason to choose a product.

A sustainable product that ends up unused in a drawer isn't a particularly sustainable promotional gift. Longevity matters.

DESIGN IS CRITICAL

Our customers' audiences live in a world shaped by Apple, Samsung, Google and a host of beautifully designed consumer brands.

Promotional technology has to step up and exist in that same world.

Colour, weight, finish, shape and branding all matter. Sometimes the best branding isn't the biggest logo. A subtle illuminated logo, engraved detail, NFC chip, QR code or carefully chosen tones can make a product feel much more desirable and likely to be kept and used, creating brand awareness.

Buyers should be asking: "Would I use this if it didn't have a client's logo on it?"

If the answer is yes, they're probably getting somewhere and the choice of supplier, product and marketing is right.

PERSONALITY COUNTS

Tech can also be fun. For years, our industry has sometimes treated technology as the sensible corporate gift category. But the products that get talked about often have something different about them.

A clever feature. An unexpected colour. A satisfying magnetic connection. A product that makes someone say: "That's cool. Where did you get it?"

That little bit of personality creates engagement, and that's ultimately what promotional merchandise is supposed to do.

FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENCE

Finally, it has to work and work well.

We need to pay attention to the specifications that affect everyday life: charging speed,



power output, weight, battery technology, connector flexibility, compatibility and portability.

Nobody wants a beautifully branded power bank that takes forever to charge their phone, or a cable that doesn't support the devices they actually use.

This is where your top tech suppliers can add real value. Rather than simply selling a power bank, we should understand why one power bank is better suited to a particular audience than another.

Because the future of promotional tech isn't about adding logos to gadgets. It's about combining sustainability, great design, personality and genuinely useful functionality to create products people choose to keep.

And perhaps that's the best measure of sustainability, and promotional effectiveness, we have. If they keep it, we've done our job.

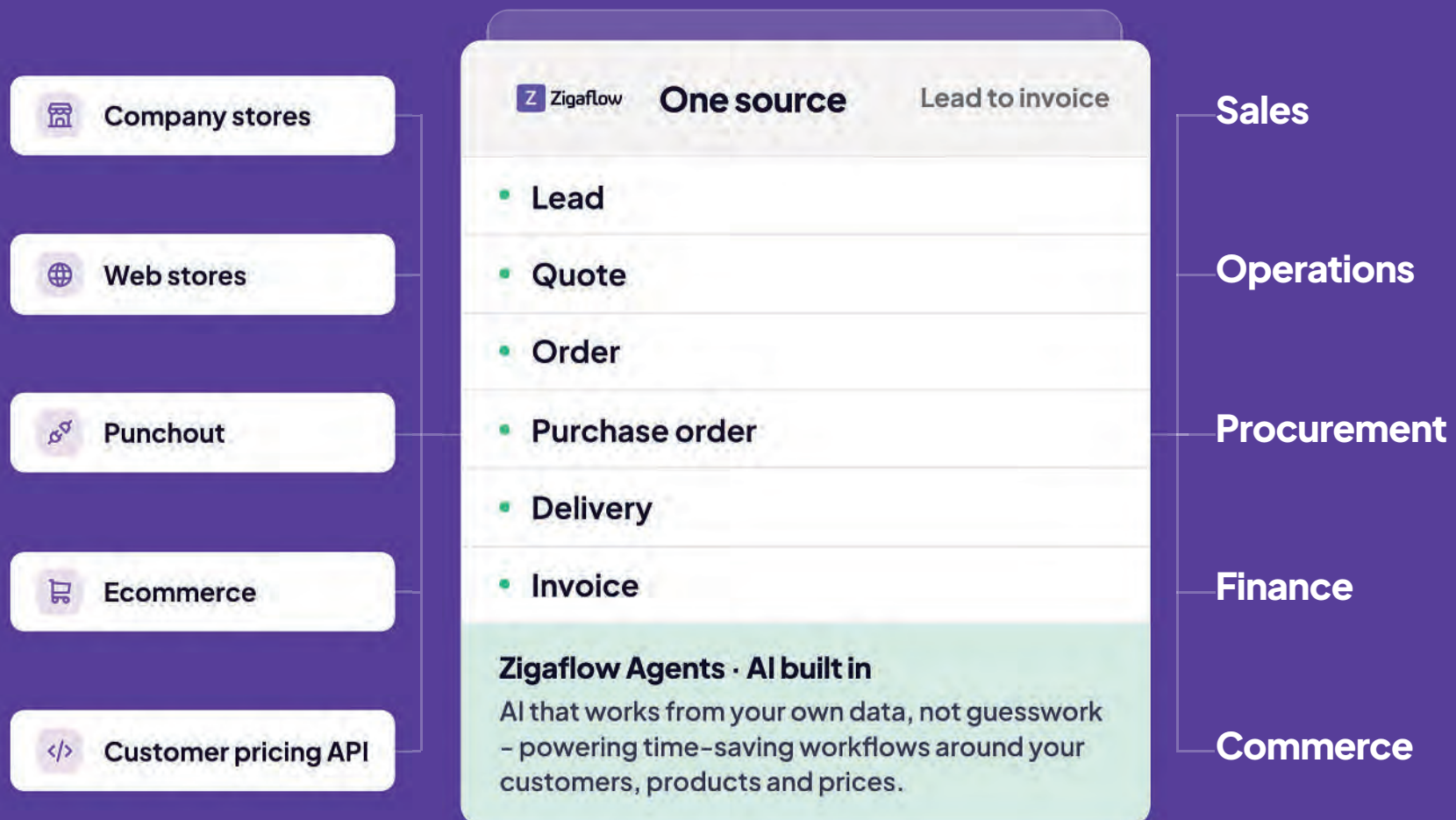


Matt Pluckrose is a tech industry expert

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TRADITION UPDATED

For five decades Pro-Ad has offered a creative and personal approach to merchandise

Forty-five years is a long time by any measure, but in the promotional products market it's an entirely different world.



When Carlo Nardini founded Pro-Ad in Newcastle upon Tyne, there were no power banks or Bluetooth speakers. Instead, there was a reliance on traditional, British-made products such as pottery, textiles and leather goods. Artwork was supplied as bromides while communications and approvals relied heavily on the postal system. There were far fewer personalisation options and much longer lead times.

But while so much has changed – including Pro-Ad itself – the ethos driving the business remains. As Carlo likes to put it: “Our values are traditional – the business is not.”

Carlo came from an advertising background – bringing an instinct for ideas, communication and understanding what a client was trying to achieve – and worked alongside his brother Antony, who had experience in the gift trade.

The trajectory of Pro-Ad as a family business was cemented just before the company began, with the birth of Carlo's son Loren – now Pro-Ad's commercial director.

Carlo said: “I've always considered myself a solutions provider. We've never wanted to be merely order-takers – customers get the best from us when they treat us as an extra member of their team.”

That creativity has been front and centre in Pro-Ad's work. When Greggs asked for an ‘outstanding service’ award, the team resisted playing it safe and created something more memorable: a golden sausage roll.



Carlo adds: “My approach was to spot an opportunity, look beyond the obvious and build lasting relationships by finding practical solutions – although not all have been quite as golden, or as pastry-shaped.”

An early example occurred at a North East trade show, where Carlo met Sir Brendan Foster, the Olympian who had become

Nike's managing director. Brendan approached Carlo with a keyring his US headquarters had struggled to deliver on time, giving him samples to see what could be done.

Rather than importing it from the US, Carlo sourced the specialist material and partnered with a UK manufacturer to produce thousands of keyrings – a move that developed into a long-term relationship with Nike.

Loren has grown up in the business. His primary focus is commercial development, with particular emphasis on technology and the expectations of the next generation of Pro-Ad customers.

That adaptability was demonstrated during Covid, when the business rapidly moved into masks, gloves and sanitisers, learning unfamiliar products and standards to help customers continue to operate.

It was far from the first time Pro-Ad had found itself in challenging waters – but quiet determination and hard work have paid off each time, through Black Wednesday, the prolonged banking crisis of 2008 and numerous recessions. Carlo remembers: “When we went through ‘Black Wednesday’ in 1992, someone asked what we were going to do. My answer was simple: ‘Let's go out and find more work.’”

Another key component in Pro-Ad's success has been its wider team, four of whom have racked up 100 years of combined service. Carlo describes their accumulated knowledge as extraordinary, with each member “an essential cog in our business”.

That ‘extra mile’ philosophy extends to the community. Pro-Ad's 40th anniversary raised a significant sum for Age UK Northumberland, while the company has also supported NE Youth and Newcastle's People's Kitchen.

Good communication remains at the heart of Pro-Ad – responsiveness, attention to detail and ensuring the customer experience feels connected. Where a telephone conversation would be quicker, clearer and more personal than an email, picking up the phone can make all the difference.

That personal touch is also to the fore in Pro-Ad's popular Expo shows – with the next due on March 17, 2027, marking the company's 45th year. Digital tools create

reach and convenience, while face-to-face engagement remains essential, generating ideas, confidence and stronger relationships.

Pro-Ad's industry recognition includes gold and silver at the Institute of Promotional Marketing COGs Awards and Best Product Catalogue in the BPMA Awards.

More important still, in Carlo's eyes, is Pro-Ad's EcoVadis Platinum accreditation, alongside its long-standing partnership with Ecologi. “Sustainability must be authentic, evidenced and commercially viable. Our role is to help customers distinguish meaningful decisions from greenwashing.”

Pro-Ad has expanded far beyond its beginnings in Newcastle's Grey Street. Last year, it acquired Corporate Recognition, reflecting its commitment to growth and long-term customer relationships.

The business continues to explore opportunities for growth, including partnerships, further expansion in Europe and developments within print – but any move must have the right strategic and cultural fit.

So, what's next in the Pro-Ad story?

There are exciting and challenging developments ahead, including the wider use of AI and technology. The business intends to remain at the forefront of that change, embracing innovation where it can enhance its service.

But progress will never come at the expense of relationships. Many Pro-Ad customers have worked with the business for decades and that trust is one of its greatest strengths. The team loves what they do, and that passion continues to shape the business. The ambition is to combine innovation with experience while preserving the authenticity, trust and personal connection on which Pro-Ad has been built.



THE HEAT IS ON

Page group members celebrated its best practitioners at the annual conference and awards



Despite the fact that it was held on one of the hottest days of the year, more than 120 delegates showed up for the annual Page group gathering.

Combining the annual conference, exhibition, and awards dinner, the event took place at period manor building Walton Hall Hotel and Spa in Warwickshire.

During the tabletop exhibition in the afternoon, 50 suppliers took full advantage of the opportunity to network face-to-face with Page members. When the exhibition ended, delegates had time to enjoy the sun and the spectacular grounds of Walton Hall.

Afterwards it was time for the awards dinner – all the awards presented at the conference recognise outstanding quality, service, and efficiency from both distributors and suppliers.

SUPPLIER AWARDS

Scores for supplier service and efficiency are taken from the Page members' annual surveys to determine the winners.



The winner of the Gold Supplier of the Year Award was Pinpoint, with Silver awards to Laltex, Preseli, and Tancia.

Preseli managing director, Dave Wilson summed up the feelings of recipients.

"We were absolutely chuffed to receive a Supplier of the Year Award at the Page Partnership catalogue launch and awards dinner," he said. "Thanks to all the Page members who voted for us and thanks to Brian Hayward and the team for another fantastic event."



MADE IN BRITAIN

Last year saw the introduction of a new award for the Manufacturer of the Year. Silver awards went to Jute Trading, FleQs, and The Umbrella Company, with the Gold Manufacturer award going to sustainable merchandise specialist WCM&A.



Director, Jules Adam, said: "We're proud that WCM&A Ltd has been named Manufacturer of the Year award at this year's Page Partnership catalogue launch, for the second year running. This category recognises outstanding service and exceptional UK-made products."

DISTRIBUTORS AWARDS

Suppliers also had the opportunity to score Page members in their annual survey. The winners of the distributors' Silver awards were Impress Ipswich, T King Associates, and The Purple Company. This year's Gold awards winners went to Boosters, Steel City, and LSi.

Steel City managing director, James Biggin, said the company was delighted with its Gold.



"What makes this award even more special is that it's voted for by our suppliers – the people we work with every day to help deliver the best possible service to our customers. A huge thank you to everyone who voted for us."

After the awards were given out, the soul band Chain of Fools came on to provide some fantastic entertainment to dance the night away to.

Networking continued in the main bar and gardens into the small hours.

HIT THE GREENS

The following morning, 15 brave delegates took part in the third GBH Golf Day at the Stoneleigh Deer Park Golf Club course in memory of the fondly remembered Page founder George Hayward. Organised by BPMA Chairman and DTB director Clive Alcott.



Teams battled through the 30° heat and a selection of hangovers. Over the 18 holes of sweat and tears there were some strong performances from Matt Porter (Coronation Promotions), Clive Allcott and Dan Berry (LSi).

Clive won the Nearest the pin competition, with the day's longest drive prize going to Matt Porter.

With a score of 44 points, Tim Buckridge of Ultimate Incentive won the event on behalf of the Distributors for the third year running.

The afternoon concluded with snacks and drinks during the presentations. A big thanks go to BTC Activewear, Sharon Lee and T King Associates for sponsoring the event.



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